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The Sources of Jonson's "Discoveries"

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THE SOURCES OF JONSON'S "DISCOVERIES"

J. E. SPINGARN

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With the regards of the author

Chas. H. H. H.
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THE SOURCES OF JONSON'S "DISCOVERIES."

THE final pages of Ben Jonson's *Timber, or Discoveries*, which appeared posthumously in 1641, are devoted to a discussion of the nature of poetry and the drama. In the annotated edition of Professor Schelling these pages are about fifteen in number; and in this brief paper I desire to call attention to their sources.

I. Daniel Heinsius, the distinguished Dutch scholar, published his treatise, *De tragœdiæ constitutione*, at Leyden in 1611, and it was immediately accepted by critics and playwrights as a work of the highest authority; Chapelain called it "the quintessence of Aristotle's *Poetics*," and it was cited by Corneille and annotated by Racine. The whole of Jonson's final essay, "Of the Magnitude and Compass of Any Fable, Epic or Dramatic" (ed. Schelling, pp. 83-87), is a literal translation of the fourth chapter of Heinsius's treatise. Two other important passages (pp. 78-79, 79-80) are also taken bodily from the same source. I have set the texts side by side, and no further introduction is necessary. To another treatise of Heinsius, *Ad Horatii de Plauto et Terentio judicium dissertatio*,¹ Jonson was indebted in his discussion

¹ This appeared as one of the notes at the end of HEINSIUS's edition of Horace (Leyden, 1612, notes, pp. 78-99), and was republished as a separate dissertation in his edition of Terence in 1635. It has been reprinted many times, and is readily accessible in ZEUNE's edition of Terence (London, 1820; cf. Vol. I, pp. xxxviii ff., lviii) or in that of GILES (London, 1837; cf. pp. xxv ff., xxxix). The marginal note in the original folio edition of the *Discoveries* (1641, p. 129: "*Heins: de Sat: . . . Pag: incomm. 153 d seq.*") evidently refers to this obligation, but the pagination, if correct, is that of some edition which I have been unable to find. Professor Schelling, who seems to have had the same difficulty, refers his readers to HEINSIUS's Horace, 1612, notes, p. 61; if he had turned to p. 78 of that very edition, he would have discovered the actual source of Jonson's indebtedness. Over nine pages in all are due to these two treatises of Heinsius.

of the ludicrous (*Discoveries*, p. 81, l. 6—p. 83, l. 13; also p. 80, ll. 26 ff.); but these passages it does not seem necessary to cite.

II. The Bohemian Jesuit, Jacobus Pontanus, published a treatise on poetry, *Poeticarum institutionum libri tres*, at Ingolstadt, in 1594. This work was received with considerable favor, and was reprinted at least twice before the close of the century. Soon after, Joannes Buchler, of Gladbach, made an abstract of Pontanus's treatise, under the title of *Reformata poeseos institutio, ex R. P. Jacobi Pontani libris concinnata*, and appended it to his poetical dictionary, *Sacrarum profanarumque phrasium poeticarum thesaurus*. The combined work was reprinted many times, and at least five editions were published at London during the course of the seventeenth century. From Buchler's abridgment of Pontanus Jonson has borrowed several important passages, but his debt here is more casual and intermittent than in the case of Heinsius. I cite one example, though I cannot consider it as having any special significance.¹ I have used the eleventh edition of Buchler, which was printed at London in 1632, five years before Jonson's death.

JONSON'S *Timber, or Discoveries*.
(Ed. Schelling, Boston, 1892,
p. 78.)

HEINSIUS'S *De tragoediae constitutione*.
(Leyden, 1643, pp. 3, 4.)

Aristotle was the first accurate critic and truest judge, nay, the greatest philosopher the world ever had; for he noted the vices of all knowledges in all creatures, and out of many men's perfections in a science he formed still one art. So he taught us two offices together, how we ought to judge rightly of others, and what we ought to imitate specially in ourselves; but all this in vain without a natural wit and a poetical nature in chief. For no man, so soon as he knows this or reads it, shall be able to write

Primus Aristoteles, & quod Critici est accurati, vitia notavit: & quod veri est philosophi, à virtutibus multorum, vnam fecit artem: simulque vtrunque docuit; tum de aliis quid statuendum, tum in nostris, quid sequendum esset. Frustra tamen, ni ingenium accedat. sed poëticum in primis. Neque enim qui hæc sciet, ideo Tragœdiam conscribet: sed si aptus à natura ac ingenio accedat, ideo perfectam scribet. . . . Iam prudentia civilis, ubi magis requiritur? non in sententiis & gnomis modo:

¹ For other passages in which Jonson appears to have borrowed from Buchler, cf. JONSON, p. 76, and BUCHLER, pp. 418, 427; JONSON, p. 77, and BUCHLER, p. 421.

the better; but as he is adopted by nature, he shall grow the perfecter writer. He must have civil prudence and eloquence, and that whole, not taken up by snatches or pieces in sentences or remnants when he will handle business or carry counsels, as if he came then out of the declaimer's gallery or shadow furnished but out of the body of the state, which commonly is the school of men: *Virorum schola respub[lica]*.

JONSON, pp. 79, 80.

I am not of that opinion to conclude a poet's liberty within the narrow limits of laws which either the grammarians or philosophers prescribe. For before they found out those laws there were many excellent poets that fulfilled them, amongst whom none more perfect than Sophocles, who lived a little before Aristotle. Which of the Greeklings durst ever give precepts to Demosthenes? or to Pericles, whom the age surnamed Heavenly, because he seemed to thunder and lighten with his language? or to Alcibiades, who had rather Nature for his guide than Art for his master? But whatsoever nature at any time dictated to the most happy, or long exercise to the most laborious, that the wisdom and learning of Aristotle hath brought into an art because he understood the causes of things; and what other men did by chance or custom he doth by reason; and not only found out the way not to err, but the short way we should take not to err. Many

sed, quod felicissime à te præstitum meminimus non semel, cum consilia tractantur, non ex vmbra enim ad hæc accedebas: sed cum in Repub. versatus esses, quæ magnatum schola est.

HEINSIUS, pp. 2, 3.

Neque in ea sum opinione, vt ad eas, quas grammatici præscribunt, aut philosophi angustias, poëtæ libertatem esse revocandam arbitrer. cum præsertim ante observationes has summi in Tragœdia extiterint poëtæ. nemo enim postea ad maiestatem Sophocleam, meo quidem animo, accessit. quem non paucis annis ante Aristotelem, Philosophorum Regem fato suo functum satis constat. Verum idem aliis in artibus quoque vsu venit. Nam quis Græculorum vnquam qui dicendi traderent præcepta, ad diuinam & fatalem vim Demosthenis accessit, qui plerisque multo est antiquior? Nec Pericles ante eum, quem Olympium dixere, quod tonare ac fulgurare videretur, neque Alcibiades, ac alii, quos ante hos fuisse in Republica disertos fama tenet, præceptorem potius quem sequerentur, quam naturam ducem habuerunt. Sed quæcumque aut felicibus natura dictat, aut exercitatio prolixa dat laboriosis, quod Latini nescio an satis recte habi-

things in Euripides hath Aristophanes wittily reprehended, not out of art, but out of truth. For Euripides is sometimes peccant, as he is most times perfect. But judgment when it is greatest, if reason doth not accompany it, is not ever absolute.

tum dixerint, in artem redigit vir sapiens & eruditus. Ita fit, vt & causas intelligat, & quæ forte alii efficiunt aut vsu, ex ratione agat: neque viam tantum ne aberret, sed & habeat compendium qua eat. Multa in Euripide facete Aristophanes notauit; neque ex arte sed è vero tamen. Sæpe Euripides, alibi quæ peccat, alibi plenissime & accuratè præstat. iudicium enim, etiam cum summum est, nisi ratio accedat, non est absolutum.

JONSON, pp. 83-87.

Of the magnitude and compass of any fable, epic or dramatic.

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If a man would build a house, he would first appoint a place to build it in, which he would define within certain bounds. So in the constitution of a poem, the action is aimed at by the poet, which answers place in a building, and that action hath his largeness, compass, and proportion. But as a court or king's palace requires other dimensions than a private house, so the epic asks a magnitude from other poems, since what is place in the one is action in the other; the difference is in space. So that by this definition we conclude the fable to be the imitation of one perfect and entire action, as one perfect and entire place is required to a building. By perfect, we understand that to which nothing is wanting, as place to the building that is

HEINSIUS, pp. 28-38.

Cap. IV.

Ambitus Tragœdiæ & magnitudo. Actio quæ tota & perfecta. Quæ sit Vna Actio. quot item modis dicatur Vnam. Quo modo in Tragœdia Vna requiratur Actio.

Quemadmodum de ædificio qui cogitat, primo ei locum designare solet; quem mox certa magnitudine ac ambitu definit: ita in Tragœdiæ, de qua nunc agimus, constitutione, à Philosopho est factum. Id in quo versatur Tragœdia, est actio. Sicut autem ædificio locus, sic Tragœdiæ accommodatur actio, magnitudine, ambitu, proportionem. Igitur vt aliam requirit magnitudinem vel regia vel aula, quam priuata domus: ita aliam Tragœdia requirit actionem quam Epos. Nam cum vtriusque sit actio, sicut ibi vtriusque est locus; spatio vtrobique multum differunt; hic actio, ibi locus. Jam vero, tum perfectæ tum totius actionis imitationem esse Tragœdiam, in definitione audiuius: ita vt perfectus ac totus ad ædificium requiritur locus. Perfectum autem id

raised, and action to the fable that is formed. It is perfect, perhaps not for a court or king's palace, which requires a greater ground, but for the structure we would raise; so the space of the action may not prove large enough for the epic fable, yet be perfect for the dramatic, and whole.

*What we understand by whole.*¹
—Whole we call that, and perfect, which hath a beginning, a midst, and an end. So the place of any building may be whole and entire for that work, though too little for a palace. As to a tragedy or a comedy, the action may be convenient and perfect that would not fit an epic poem in magnitude. So a lion is a perfect creature in himself, though it be less than that of a buffalo or rhinocerate. They differ but in specie: either in the kind is absolute; both have their parts, and either the whole. Therefore, as in every body, so in every action which is the subject of a just work, there is required a certain proportionable greatness, neither too vast nor too minute. For that which happens to the eyes when we behold a body, the same happens to the memory when we contemplate an action. I look upon a monstrous giant, as Tityus, whose body covered nine acres of land, and mine eye sticks upon every part; the whole that consists of those parts will never be taken in at one entire view. So in a fable, if the action be too great, we can never comprehend the whole to-

est, cui nihil deest. in loco quidem ædificii respectu, quod construitur: in Tragoedia autem actionis, quæ formatur. vt perfectus autem, non pro regia aut aula, quæ majorem postulat, sed pro ædificio ipso, ædificii est locus: ita spatium actionis, non pro Epico opere immensum, sed pro Dramate ipso requiratur perfectum. id autem minus est. Jam vero totum est, quod principium, medium habet, & finem. Ita ædificii locus est totus, quamvis minor sit quam aulæ: vt & Tragoediæ actionem esse totam oportet, licet minor quam Epici. Sic perfectum animal est leo, quamvis multum cedat elephanto. Totum est leonis caput, licet minus sit quam vri aut tauri. Alteri enim differunt specie, & in sua absolutus est vterque: alterum partes habet suas, ideoque est totum. Sicut ergo omni in corpore, ita & in actione qualibet, quæ sit justî poematis subiectum, certa magnitudine est opus; quæ nec vasta nec exigua sit nimis. Quippe id quod euenire oculis solet, corpus cum videmus, idem euenit memoriæ, cum actionem contemplamur. vastum enim corpus qui videt, dum in partibus quibusque hæret, totum illud vnicumque quod è partibus his ipsis constat, sequi intuitu non potest. In poemate, si magna nimium est actio, nemo totam simul cogitatione complectetur. contra si exile nimium est corpus, nulla ex intuitu illius oritur voluptas. Nulla enim datur contemplanti mora. quia simul sit intuitus & euanescit. Sicut qui formicam

¹This and the following marginal headings of the original folio correspond more or less to Heinsius's chapter headings.

gether in our imagination. Again, if it be too little, there ariseth no pleasure out of the object; it affords the view no stay; it is beheld, and vanisheth at once. As if we should look upon an ant or pismire, the parts fly the sight, and the whole considered is almost nothing. 'The same happens in action, which is the object of memory, as the body is of sight. Too vast oppresseth the eyes, and exceeds the memory; too little scarce admits either.

What the utmost bound of a fable.—Now in every action it behoves the poet to know which is his utmost bound, how far with fitness and a necessary proportion he may produce and determine it; that is, till either good fortune change into worse, or the worse into the better. For as a body without proportion cannot be goodly, no more can the action, either in comedy or tragedy, without his fit bounds. And every bound, for the nature of the subject, is esteemed the best that is largest, till it can increase no more, so it behoves the action in tragedy or comedy to be let grow till the necessity ask a conclusion; wherein two things are to be considered: first, that it exceed not the compass of one day; next, that there be place left for digression and art. For the episodes and digressions in a fable are the same that household stuff and other furniture are in a house. And so far form the measure and extent of a fable dramatic.

What [is meant] by one and entire.—Now that it should be one

videt. nam cum partes fugiant conspectum, totum quoque prope est nullum. Idem sit in actione. Sicut enim ibi corpus oculorum, ita hic memoriae objectum est actio. adde quod vt magna nimium, conspectum, ita & memoriam excedant: parua vix admittant. . . . [*Here Jonson skips from the top of page 31 to the bottom of page 32.*] . . . Primo enim crescere eo vsque recte ac produci posse, putat, donec pro earum quæ aguntur rerum ordine, vel necessario vel commode mutatio infertur. qui supremus hic est terminus: cum videlicet aut prospera in aduersam, aut aduersa in secundam mutatur fortuna. Sicut ergo corpus, sine magnitudine pulchrum esse non potest, ita neque actio Tragœdiæ. Et vt omnis qui pro rei natura est terminus, is habetur præstantissimus qui est maximus, donec crescere amplius non potest: ita ipsam crescere hactenus Tragœdiæ oportet actionem, donec necessario sit terminanda. In quo duo sunt tenenda. Primo vt vnus non excedat Solis ambitum. Secundo, vt digressioni locus relinquatur & arti. Quippe quod in domo est supellex cæteraque ornamenta, hoc in Tragœdia digressiones sunt & Episodia. Hactenus ergo, quantam esse Fabulam Tragœdiæ oporteat & actionem. Videntum & illud; vtrum vnam. Vnum duobus dicitur, vt plurimum, modis. Vel quod vnicum est, separatum, ac simplex, vt ante. Vel id quod compositum ex pluribus, postquam plura illa jam coaluerunt, vnum esse cœpit. Priori modo, vnam esse oportere Fabulam, nemo eru-

and entire. One is considerable two ways; either as it is only separate, and by itself, or as being composed of many parts, it begins to be one as those parts grow or are wrought together. That it should be one the first way alone, and by itself, no man that hath tasted letters ever would say, especially having required before a just magnitude and equal proportion of the parts in themselves. Neither of which can possibly be, if the action be single and separate, not composed of parts, which laid together in themselves, with an equal and fitting proportion, tend to the same end; which thing out of antiquity itself hath deceived many, and more this day it doth deceive. So many there be of old that have thought the action of one man to be one, as of Hercules, Theseus, Achilles, Ulysses, and other heroes; which is both foolish and false, since by one and the same person many things may be severally done which cannot fitly be referred or joined to the same end: which not only the excellent tragic poets, but the best masters of the epic, Homer and Virgil, saw. For though the argument of an epic poem be far more diffused and poured out than that of tragedy, yet Virgil, writing of Æneas, hath pretermitted many things. He neither tells how he was born, how brought up, how he fought with Achilles, how he was snatched out of battle by Venus; but that one thing, how he came into Italy, he prosecutes in twelve books. The rest of his journey, his error by sea, the sack of Troy, are

ditus dixerit. Duo quippe in Tragica requiri actione jam monuimus. magnitudinem ut justam, ita & æqualem inter sese proportionem partium. quorum neutrum, si sit una actio ac simplex, non composita ex partibus, quæ tum ad eundem tendunt finem, tum proportionem apta ac æquali inter sese componuntur, posse fieri videtur. quæ res plurimus ex ipsa antiquitate imposuit, etiamque hodie imponit. Sic non pauci olim arbitrati sunt, unius actionem esse unam. Puta Herculis, Thesei, Achillis, Ulyssis, & aliorum. Quod ineptum est ac falsum. cum ab uno eodemque multa fieri omnino possint, quæ conjungi & referri ad eundem finem commode non possunt. Quod non modo Tragici præstantes, verum & poëtæ Epicæ, Homerus pariter ac Maro, viderunt. Quanquam enim longe amplius diffusiusque Epicæ quam Tragici sit argumentum, tamen plurima Æneæ Maro prætermisit. Non enim, quomodo sit natus ac eductus, cum Achille quomodo conflixerit, ac prælio eruptus fuerit à Venere. unum hoc, quopacto in Italiam pervenerit, libris duodecim, quod nemo nescit, persecutus est. Reliqua quippe, de itinere, urbis expugnatione, aliæque, non ut argumentum operis, sed ut argumenti Episodia ponuntur. quemadmodum & Ulyssis plurima Homerus prætermisit: neque plura, quam quæ tendere ad eundem ac spectare finem videbantur, conjunxit. Contra ineptissime poëtæ, quos Philosophus recenset. quorum alter omnes Thesei, alter Herculis labores actionesque fuerat com-

put not as the argument of the work, but episodes of the argument. So Homer laid by many things of Ulysses, and handled no more than he saw tended to one and the same end. Contrary to which, and foolishly, those poets did, whom the philosopher taxeth, of whom one gathered all the actions of Theseus, another put all the labors of Hercules in one work. So did he whom Juvenal mentions in the beginning, "hoarse Codrus," that recited a volume compiled, which he called his *Theseid*, not yet finished, to the great trouble both of his hearers and himself; amongst which there were many parts had no coherence nor kindred one with other, so far they were from being one action, one fable. For as a house, consisting of divers materials becomes one structure and one dwelling, so an action, composed of divers parts, may become one fable, epic or dramatic. For example, in a tragedy, look upon Sophocles his *Ajax*: Ajax, deprived of Achilles's armor, which he hoped from the suffrage of the Greeks, disdains, and, growing impatient of the injury, rageth, and turns mad. In that humor he doth many senseless things, and at last falls upon the Grecian flock and kills a great ram for Ulysses: returning to his sense, he grows ashamed of the scorn, and kills himself; and is by the chiefs of the Greeks forbidden burial. These things agree and hang together, not as they were done, but as seeming to be done, which made the action whole, entire, and absolute.

plexus. Neque aliter intelligendus ille Iuuenalis locus est de Codro. quem ideo raucum ibi dixit, quod immensum opus, in quo omnes Thesei recenserentur actiones, summa cum & auditorum molestia & sua, recitaret. inter quas fuisse sane plurimas oportet, quæ nil inter se commune haberent. quare neque vnam siue actionem siue fabulam subjectum operis habebat, sed vnus. Cæterum vt domus non ex vno constat sed est vna: ita non ex vno constat, etiam si vna, actio Tragediæ. . . . Exempli gratia, Sophoclis Aiacei videamus: Ajax armis priuatus, indignatur, & vt erat contumeliæ impatiens, rabiit ac furit. Ergo, quod pro tali est, haud pauca sine mente agit, & postremo pro Vlyssæ pecudes insanus mactat. vbi autem ad se rediit, opprobrii pertæsus, manus sibi infert, ac sepulchro prohibetur. quæ, non autem cætera, quæcunque toto vitæ tempore ab Ajace gesta, apte inter se cohererent. Sed nec quælibet ex illis per se sufficit: omnes vero congruentes, vnam illam statuunt cuius sunt partes. Quippe & totam debere esse actionem diximus, & absolutam. Totum autem vt ex partibus constat, neque sine omnibus partibus est totum, ita vt sit absolutum, non modo omnes requiruntur partes, sed & tales quæ sunt veræ. Totius autem pars est vera, quam si tollas, aut mouetur totum, aut non amplius est totum. Nam quod tale est, vt siue absit, siue adsit, plane ad totum nil intersit, pars totius dici proprie non potest. Qualia sunt Episodia, de quibus postea agemus. vel ejusdem actio-

The conclusion concerning the whole, and the parts.—Which are episodes.—For the whole, as it consisteth of parts, so without all the parts it is not the whole; and to make it absolute is required not only the parts, but such parts as are true. For a part of the whole was true, which, if you take away, you either change the whole or it is not the whole. For if it be such a part, as, being present or absent, nothing concerns the whole, it cannot be called a part of the whole; and such are the episodes, of which hereafter. For the present here is one example: the single combat of Ajax with Hector, as it is at large described in Homer, nothing belongs to this Ajax of Sophocles.

JONSON, p. 74.

But how differs a Poem from what we call a Poesy?—A poem, as I have told you, is the work of a poet; the end and fruit of his labor and study. Poesy is his skill or craft of making; the very fiction itself, the reason or form of the work. And these three voices differ, as the thing done, the doing, and the doer; the thing feigned, the feigning, and the feigner; so the poem, the poesy, and the poet. Now the poesy is the habit of the art . . .

nes longe diuersæ. Sic, exempli gratia, singulare Ajacis cum Hectore certamen, quod prolixè describitur Homero, ad Ajacem Sophoclis non spectat.

BUCHLER'S *Phrasium poeticarum thesaurus* (p. 414).

Quid distent Poëma & Poësis.

Caput VI.

Poëma est opus ipsum Poëtæ, id nimirum quod effectum est, finis & fructus opere atque studij, quod impendit Poëta. Poësis est fictio ipsa, ratione ac forma Poëmatis, sive industria atque opera facientis: ut Poëma, Poësis, Poëta, hæc tria differant, quomodo tres personæ verbi à quibus oriuntur, *πεποιήμαι, πεποίησαι, πεποίηται*. A prima existit Poëma, ab altera Poësis, à tertia Poëta, quasi dicas factum, factio, factor; aut fictum, fictio, fictor . . . Poësis interdum ipsum etiam habitum seu artem, Poëticam videlicet ipsam declarat.¹

¹ Buchler's original is to be found in PONTANUS, *Institutiones poeticæ* (Ingolstadt, 1594), p. 20. SCALIGER, *Poeticæ*, lib. i, cap. 2 (ed. 1617, p. 12), uses very similar language. The distinction was, of course, a commonplace of the classical schools, and may be found in Plu-

The significance of this literal translation seems to me greater than the mere problem of *Quellenforschungen*. Here is no question of plagiarism, for the *Discoveries* were never published during Jonson's lifetime, and there is no evidence that they were ever intended for publication. I have not as yet concluded my researches, nor can the literary historian afford to devote much of his time to the subsidiary task of source-hunting; but these initial results appear to suggest that the *Discoveries* were merely a commonplace book, in which Jonson recorded jottings of any kind which might seem to have future usefulness. But we are lucky indeed to have even the commonplace book of the author of *Volpone*.

In the second place, the significance of Jonson's interest in Heinsius, Pontanus, and Buchler is this: the influence of the Italian critics had to some extent been superseded by that of the Dutch and German critics during the first half of the seventeenth century.

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tarch, Cornelius Fronto, Aphthonius, Hermogenes, and others (cf. WALZ, *Rhet. Græci*, 1832, pp. 16, 60; VOSSIUS, *De nat. et const. poet.*, cap. iv, § 2, and GUMMERE, in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. XIX, pp. 61, 152). But here Jonson certainly seems to employ the language of Buchler or of Buchler's original; I am inclined to think that he was acquainted with both.



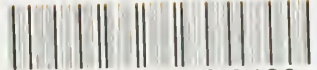
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